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Regional cooperation

Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

Summary

The present addendum to the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields contains resolutions and decisions adopted at the sessions of the regional commissions in the first half of 2003, when four of the five regional commissions held their regular sessions: the Economic Commission for Europe held its fifty-eighth session in Geneva from 4 to 6 March; the Economic Commission for Africa held its thirty-sixth session/second session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in Addis Ababa on 1 June; and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia held its twenty-second session in Beirut from 14 to 17 April. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific was scheduled to hold its fifty-ninth session in Bangkok from 24 to 30 April but, in view of the inauspicious regional situation resulting from the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), it was decided that the session would be held in two phases. The first phase was held from 24 to 25 April and the second, which will include a ministerial segment, will be held at an appropriate date to be determined in consultation with the Commission's member States. Resolutions or decisions emanating from the review of

* E/2003/100.

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substantive issues to be discussed at the second regular phase of the session will be submitted to the resumed session of the Economic and Social Council for its action or attention. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which meets biennially, will not hold a session in 2003.

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I. Matters calling for action by the Council

A. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

1. At the first phase of its fifty-ninth session, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) approved the following draft resolution and decision for adoption by the Council:

Draft resolution I
Admission of Timor-Leste as a full member of the Commission: amendment of the terms of reference of the Commission

The Economic and Social Council,

Noting that Timor-Leste became a Member of the United Nations on 27 September 2002,

Also noting that, in accordance with paragraph 3 of the terms of reference of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Timor-Leste shall thereupon be admitted as a member of the Commission,

Decides to amend paragraphs 2 and 3 of the terms of reference of the Commission accordingly.

Draft decision I
Venue of the sixtieth session of the Commission

The Economic and Social Council,

Considering the recommendation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to accept the invitation of the Government of China to host the sixtieth session of the Commission,

1. *Expresses its gratitude* to the Government of China for its generous offer;

2. *Approves* the holding of the sixtieth session of the Commission in Shanghai, China, during April 2004.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

2. At its twenty-second session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) approved the following draft resolutions for adoption by the Council:

Draft resolution I
Consideration of the establishment within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia of a United Nations Arabic language centre

The Economic and Social Council,

Referring to General Assembly resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999 concerning the pattern of conferences,

Referring also to the requests and suggestions put forward to the Secretariat of the United Nations by the delegations of Arab States Members of the United Nations

concerning Arabic language services and, in particular, to the proposal of the delegation of Egypt that is set forth in annex II to the Report of the Committee on Conferences[1] and the letter dated 31 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, written in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of July 2001, concerning multilingualism,[2]

Recognizing the importance of the coordinating role that could be played by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, given that it is located in the Arab region, with respect to strengthening Arabic language services in the United Nations system in close cooperation with United Nations Headquarters Arabic translation and editorial services and benefiting from the high level of expertise in the region,

1. *Calls upon* the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to consider the establishment of a United Nations Arabic language centre, based at the Commission, of which the objective, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the United Nations, and taking into consideration the requisite technical, financial and administrative needs, shall be to raise the technical and linguistic level of the Arabic terminology used in United Nations documents, in order to facilitate the use of the Arabic language in such documents;

2. *Also calls upon* the secretariat of the Commission, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the United Nations, to undertake the establishment of a committee responsible for determining the competences of the aforementioned centre;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to follow up implementation of this resolution and to submit a report on the progress achieved in that regard to the Commission at its twenty-third session.

Draft resolution II
The establishment within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia of a committee on women

The Economic and Social Council,

Aware of the importance of action relating to the empowerment of women and the improvement of their status, and of making available equal opportunities for their empowerment and increased participation at all levels of the development process,

Aware also of the importance of coordination with regard to the empowerment of women and of respect for the particularities, customs and culture of each Arab country in order to harmonize Arab positions at global conferences and in the follow-up to global conferences organized by the United Nations, with a view to incorporating the regional dimension in international documents,

Affirming the importance of the involvement of the interested parties in member countries of the Commission in the planning, development and follow-up to

[1] A/49/32/Rev.1.
[2] A/56/261.

implementation of secretariat programmes relating to the empowerment of women and of mainstreaming the gender perspective in activities and policies,

Guided by the action taken by the other United Nations regional commissions that have established special committees on women,

Taking into consideration the recommendation made by the Committee on Social Development[3] of the Commission at its fourth session, held in Beirut from 3 to 5 July 2002, concerning the establishment within the Commission of a committee on women,

1. *Decides* to establish within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia a committee on women comprising representatives of member countries who are specialists in women's issues, to be responsible for the following:

(a) Identifying the women-related priorities of the programmes of work and medium-term plans of the Commission;

(b) Monitoring developments with respect to the status of women and evaluating indicators and statistics with a view to formulating an integrated policy for the advancement and empowerment of women;

(c) Monitoring the progress made in women-related activities of the Commission secretariat;

(d) Following up global and regional conferences and the participation of member countries therein and coordinating the endeavours of member countries and regional organizations with regard to implementation of the resolutions and recommendations adopted at such conferences;

(e) Coordinating action at the regional level towards the adoption of unified positions on the issue at international gatherings and in follow-up to the performance by member countries of the undertakings to which they made a commitment in human rights instruments concerning women;

(f) Preparing and implementing field projects for the advancement and empowerment of women in member countries of the Commission and finding the necessary funding for such projects;

(g) According the requisite importance to women in the regions, in which wars and conflicts are prevalent, and in particular to Palestinian women, who are suffering in the conditions in which the Palestinian people is living under continuing Israeli occupation;

2. *Also decides* that the Committee on Women shall hold its sessions biennially, with effect from 2004, and that an inaugural session should be held before the end of 2003;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary of the Commission to establish a women's centre within the secretariat of the Commission with responsibility for acting as the secretariat of the Committee on Women;

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[3] See *Report on the Fourth Session of the Committee on Social Development* (E/ESCWA/SD/2002/IG.1/9).

4. *Also requests* the Executive Secretary to follow up implementation of this resolution and to submit a report on the matter to the Commission at its twenty-third session.

II. Matters brought to the attention of the Council

Economic Commission for Africa

3. At its thirty-sixth session, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)/Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development issued a Ministerial Statement which emphasized the need for (a) mutual accountability, policy coherence and development effectiveness; (b) making the International Monetary Fund (IMF) work better for Africa; and (c) overcoming the macroeconomic challenges of HIV/AIDS and thereby contributing to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The Conference of African Ministers also adopted a resolution on the proposed work programme of ECA for the biennium 2004-2005.

Ministerial statement

4. Key issues raised in the ministerial statement are summarized below.

5. On *aid and development effectiveness*, the Ministers recognized that if current trends continued, Africa would not meet the Millennium Development Goals. Reversing the trend would require a new and energized relationship between Africa and its partners, based on trust and a shared responsibility for development effectiveness. The Ministers welcomed the accession by 15 African countries to the African peer review mechanism envisaged under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and urged those countries to move forward with peer review, as well as urging others to sign up. They welcomed progress on aid quality and official development assistance (ODA) commitments, but warned that the level of aid flows to Africa remained a major concern and needed to be further increased. They also welcomed the proposed International Finance Facility as the first of its kind, designed to mobilize additional resources for the poorest countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals; urged Africa's partners to ensure that all policies impacting on African development, including those in the areas of ODA, trade, market access and agriculture, were consistent with the Millennium Development Goals, and recommended that Africa's partners adopt domestic policy measures that would increase foreign direct investment flows to Africa.

6. On *trade*, the Ministers expressed their deep concern at the negative impact of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) agricultural subsidies on the African agriculture sector and called for action by OECD countries to ensure that the poorest countries benefit quickly from trade liberalization by providing immediate duty-free and quota-free market access, removing non-tariff barriers and developing an appropriate price stabilization mechanism. They warned that negotiations on the key elements of the Doha Development Round had achieved little, with key deadlines for market access for agricultural products, TRIPS and public health, and special and differential treatment missed. They urged Africa's development partners to respond positively to African proposals in order to make

the World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting to be held in Cancun in September 2003 a success.

7. On *debt*, the Ministers warned that the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative was not delivering long-term debt sustainability and called for the rapid establishment of a legal technical assistance facility to help those countries deal with creditor litigation. They recognized that domestic debt in many African countries required urgent attention because it reduced fiscal flexibility, raised domestic interest rates and crowded out investment; and endorsed the ECA plan to convene an African expert group meeting on debt relief in September 2003, to be followed by an international conference on African debt early in 2004 to meet the challenge of defining the policies, instruments and initiatives that could constitute the next step in the international community's efforts to reduce Africa's debt burden.

8. On the *role of IMF*, the Ministers recommended that IMF assist African countries in developing a menu of policy options, impose fewer structural conditions and provide for "floating tranches" or outcomes-based conditions, where appropriate. They urged the Bretton Woods institutions, bilateral partners and the African Development Bank to avoid cross-conditionalities that impeded African access to much-needed resources. They recommended that, to provide greater fiscal flexibility, IMF should also analyse the linkages, trade-offs and policy choices required to attain the Millennium Development Goals, as a basis for discussions with development partners on mobilizing the additional resources required for progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. They proposed that evaluating exogenous shocks — commodity price volatility, natural disasters and aid shortfalls — should be a standard feature of IMF discussions with member States, and that access to concessional lending should be extended to countries suffering from exceptional exogenous shocks such as terrorist attacks and the onslaught of new communicable diseases.

9. On *HIV/AIDS*, the Ministers projected that the HIV/AIDS epidemic would cut approximately 1 per cent from gross domestic product growth rates, significantly diminishing the prospects of realizing the economic expansion necessary to reduce poverty. They underscored the crucial leadership role of ministers of finance, planning and economic development in mobilizing sufficient resources to confront the disease and in identifying strategies to mitigate the adverse socio-economic impacts of the epidemic. They stressed that additional resources were urgently needed to support Africa's efforts to confront HIV/AIDS; and urged the Bretton Woods institutions to consider revising the eligibility criteria for assistance to middle-income countries afflicted by the AIDS epidemic and to find ways of ensuring that countries could expand expenditure on health and social welfare without violating conditionalities that imposed limits on public spending.

Programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2004-2005

10. The Conference of Ministers also adopted a resolution on the programme of work and priorities of ECA for the biennium 2004-2005 in which it expressed its support of the proposed ECA work programme. The Conference of Ministers noted that the new programme structure of ECA had been endorsed by the Conference of Ministers and the Economic and Social Council in 2002 and was characterized by congruence between organizational and programme structures, reduction in the

number of subprogrammes and the clustering of closely related activities under a single subprogramme to foster synergy and achieve greater efficiency and impact in the delivery of services. The Conference of Ministers was convinced that the proposed new organizational units, namely, the Trade and Regional Integration Division, the Office of Policy and Programme Coordination and the Human Resources Management and Finance Division, as well as the renaming of the Development Management Division as the Development Policy Management Division would demonstrate the Commission's commitment to improving the management of its programmes and the delivery of its substantive activities. It called on the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the General Assembly to support the proposed organizational and programme structures of the programme budget of ECA for the biennium 2004-2005 and to ensure that adequate resources were made available to the Commission for the implementation of that work programme.